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SUBJECT: KURDISH VIEWS FROM NINEWA

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CLASSIFIED BY: Cameron Munter, PRT Leader, Provincial Reconstruction Team Ninewa, State.

REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

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SUMMARY AND COMMENT  
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¶1. (C) PRT Mosul had lengthy discussions with three Kurdish leaders in late February: two top Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) officials and one from the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). All were united in their support for continued American presence in Iraq, the difficulties Ja'afari faces in forming a new government, the need for change in the rules governing provincial elections, the focus of Kurdish leaders on Article 58/Kirkuk, and their wariness about Turkish motives in northern Iraq. There were some differences between the Mosul-based leaders (representing both parties) and the KDP leader from Irbil on the formation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the merger of the parties: the Moslawis were optimistic, but Karim Sinjari, interior minister of the KRG, foresaw a difficult and protracted fight among the Kurds over the next year. Similarly, Sinjari was somewhat more forthcoming about economic problems, including energy shortages and corruption, than his more sanguine counterparts to the south. Speaking before the bombing in Samarra, all expressed a cautious optimism about opportunities in Nineva province and Kurdistan as a whole, and a determination to tackle tough problems head-on. PRT Mosul got the strong impression these leaders think time is on their side: they seemed to believe they can push ahead patiently on economic development and other key issues unimpeded by strife elsewhere. End Summary and Comment.

¶2. (SBU) PRT Leader and TF-BOB Brigadier General Rife met with Karim Sinjari, Interior Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and one of the leading figures in the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), on February 19 in Irbil. PRT Leader and Poloff met with Khassro Goran, Nineva Vice Governor and provincial KDP Director, at KDP Mosul Headquarters on February

¶21. PRT Leader and Poloff met with Aso Mamand, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Nineva Director and one of the leading figures of the party, Abdelbari Mohammed Faris Al-Zebari, Nineva Deputy Director and National Assembly Delegate, and Sheikh Mayadeen Ma-roof Moyadeen, Nineva PUK Spokesman, at PUK Mosul Headquarters on February 22.

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FORMATION OF THE NEW NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

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¶13. (C) Kurdish leaders in Ninewa estimate that formation of the new Iraqi Government might take some time. Asked whether they believed Ja'afari would remain as Prime Minister, Sinjari replied "we have to accept him," but added that it depended on how Ja'afari negotiated. Sinjari, Goran, and Mamand all noted that (Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution of Iraq -- "SCIRI's" nominee) Abdul al-Mahdi would have been a better candidate, but the Shia had chosen Ja'afari, and that was their decision. Of course, they added, Iran would now have greater influence. And so would Al Sadr, who was a front for Iran as well, as evinced by Iran "moving Al Sadr all over the region now," said Sinjari. "We don't like Ja'afari," Sinjari went on, "he gets nothing done. But you reject him and you reject the Shias." Mamand doubted Ja'afari could bring the country together, but all agreed it was better to have Al-Sadr inside the tent rather than outside.

¶14. (C) Goran, Sinjari, and Mamand presumed the Kurds would retain the presidency and that the biggest changes would take place within the ministries. Goran said he did not believe a Kurd would serve as minister of Defense or the Interior. He claimed such a post would be widely resisted by Arabs, since any action by a Kurdish minister would be seen as an "attack against Arabs." Sinjari disagreed believing that the Kurds must get a power ministry, such as Defense. Goran speculated the Kurds would get Foreign Affairs instead. Sinjari stated it would improve things if former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi were to get a post; until now, the Shia coalition had said no to this, but perhaps he could surface as Interior or Defense Minister.

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PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

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¶15. (C) There was wide consensus among the Kurdish leaders that

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provincial elections would not take place for a while. "The new government needed to be formed and new election laws drafted first," said Goran. While he thought elections could come as early as August, Mamand and Sinjari said they did not expect anything to occur that early. Mamand claimed there had to be a strong central government before provincial elections could be called. Sinjari and Mamand also believed it should be possible to have elections at different times in different provinces: in key provinces, as soon as possible. Sinjari urged the U.S. to work with governors and the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI). Sinjari said the IECI should be changed based on lessons from previous experience, since it was important that the balloting be safe and secure. Mamand claimed local IECI Director Oday Abed (a Sunni Arab) purposefully prevented "thousands" of displaced Kurds from voting in the election. He accused Abed of ensuring displaced Arabs could vote in Tal Afar, but made no effort to help the Kurds. Mamand said voting requirements should be re-written to make them more flexible, especially for the displaced. Expecting the Kurds who left Ninewa for security reasons to return to Mosul was unrealistic, he said.

¶16. (C) Sinjari believed that in Ninewa province, security at previous elections had been good, but the process needed technical help. He had seen a change in Mosul over time: the electorate did not just follow the lead of mullahs any more, but rather, people made their own choices. He suggested that to guard against tampering of ballots, representatives of all parties should oversee the counting process, which should take place at the sites where ballots were cast. He said the public did not believe that ballots were tamper-free once they left the site. All three men requested United Nations play a role in observing the elections as well. Regarding any outcome from the elections, the Kurdish leaders were split. Goran and Mamand said "without a doubt" that the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) would gain control of the provincial government. Sinjari said he

thought the balance of power in Ninewa would not change. Goran said he realized how important the provincial elections would be for Sunnis when he received information recently that Sunni groups had been meeting regularly to strategize on how to "take back" the provincial government. Goran seemed more concerned, however, about a possible "fight" if the government changed hands. He said the Kurds had been discriminated against historically in Mosul, and had even been refused to own property under the former regime. Goran said he feared a return to these old policies if Sunnis took control.

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MERGER OF THE PUK/KDP AND THE NEW KRG  
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¶7. (C) Although they all seemed optimistic that the KDP-PUK merger would be complete a year from the time of the signing, historical tensions among the parties were still evident. Sinjari took some shots at the PUK, accusing Iraqi President Jalal Talabani of not sticking to agreements. He also said the PUK was difficult to negotiate with since they were a collection of several groups. However, he said talks were going well at the top levels. Goran said the parliament would serve in Irbil, and that any offices in Suleimaniya would eventually be moved. It was hard work, Sinjari admitted, but it would get done on time, that is, in December of 2006. He concluded, "Nothing is more important than this."

¶8. (C) Goran said proceedings for the new Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) were moving forward as well. He noted talks, which began on February 22, would be completed within two weeks. Sinjari said he anticipated changes: the Interior Ministry would go over to the PUK and the KDP would get the position of State Minister in the Ministry (which Sinjari himself might fill). He believed Finance and Peshmerga would go to the KDP, Justice and Interior to the PUK. The number of ministries would expand to match the number of ministries in Baghdad, so the 24 ministries would expand to match the GOI ministerials. For example, Sinjari said, the KRG ministry of Transportation and Communication would become two separate ministries, as in Baghdad. Some would go to KDP, some to PUK, and some to minorities.

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ARTICLE 58 AND THE "KIRKUK" ISSUE  
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¶9. (C) An issue of importance for the Kurds is resettlement of the displaced. Interpretation of Article 58 (of the TAL), and specifically what happens to Kirkuk, had been at the root of the debate. They had faith neither in Prime Minister Ja'afari nor

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in the Iraq Property Claims Commission (IPCC). Goran called IPCC judges "cowards" with "no money to compensate anyone." Referring to it as a red line issue, Sinjari said the Kurds wanted settlement of the Kirkuk issue before the December 2007 deadline. He said the KDP would push this issue hard in the coming year. Mamand, on the other hand, seemed more confident the Kirkuk issue could be solved within the legal framework of the national assembly. He also proposed that the people of Kirkuk should ultimately decide through a referendum. Goran said the most important event that could help decide the issue would be the census coming up in 2007. He claimed it would be the first "real" census since 1957 and would prove once and for all that "Kurds" were in the majority in Kirkuk. Goran said the census would be important not for purely political reasons. Knowing who the population was, he said, would allow the government to better target resources in the country.

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CORRUPTION AND PRIVATIZATION IN THE KRG  
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¶10. (C) Sinjari said the KRG would press forward on private enterprise since it was the only way to achieve a strong

economy. The KRG had a law read this month, and this law, when passed, would encourage outside investment to bid on state-owned enterprises, making them able to own land in the KRG, for example, or enter into a joint venture. He said there would be a conference of investor states in Irbil in April with representatives from two hundred countries. Sinjari claimed corruption was being dealt with. "Corruption exists, but not on the scale some claim," he said. He said the government had created a supreme control/audit commission to make sure privatization bids were transparent, and that any tender would go through the government office. Mamand said that any U.S. or foreign company investing in Iraqi Kurdistan would have no better friend than the PUK. He said they would be on the side of industry if it faced any sort of interference.

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TURKEY: NEW BORDER CROSSING AND MOSUL CONSULATE  
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¶11. (C) The Kurdish leaders seemed skeptical about the possibility of a second border crossing between Iraq and Turkey. Sinjari noted that the Turks wanted this second crossing so the road could run directly through Tal Afar, thereby avoiding Kurdish areas of control altogether. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State David Welch had visited the site of a possible second border crossing and, Sinjari claimed, had agreed that it was a non-starter. The Habur Gate border crossing, Sinjari said, was capable of handling 3,000 vehicles either way in a day; the Turks, he said, allowed only 600-700 through daily. But there were plans on the Iraqi side to improve the existing Habur Gate crossing. The Iraqis planned to build a tunnel that "straightens out" the road at the border, and to build a second bridge alongside the existing one to increase capacity for traffic. He looked toward an opening "in the spring."

¶12. (C) On the recent visit of a Turkish diplomatic delegation to Mosul to plan for the reestablishment of a consulate, Sinjari said he said it would be good for business and Turkish investment. On the other hand, he said it was less positive if the Turks would engage in intelligence activities. Mamand agreed but remained skeptical that the consulate would in fact be a "political office." Mamand said Iraq needed all the help it could get from the international community, but that problems were bad enough in Mosul -- with "Islamic fanatics" and "former Baathists" -- without interference from the Turks. Sinjari commented on Turkish bases in Iraq, and Turkish complaints that Peshmerga harassed them. He said that there was no problem with the bases, but that the Turks should operate in the open. They traveled, he said, in civilian clothes and unmarked cars. Thus, when they came to checkpoints, they were stopped until their identities could be established. He suggested the Turks should tell Iraqi/Kurdish authorities where they wanted to go and that they should travel in uniform, so there would be no such misunderstandings. "They tell us in advance, and we'll let them through," he said. He called for clear dialogue.

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TURKEY, IRAQ, AND THE PKK  
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¶13. (C) When asked about his party's relationship with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Sinjari answered, "we consider the PKK a terrorist organization." But when questioned whether reports that the KDP turned a blind eye to PKK activity, Sinjari

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said, "we neither help nor hinder them." Goran expressed more sympathy for the beleaguered party from Turkey, especially noting the large number of Kurdish refugees residing in Makhmour. Although Sinjari claimed the camp was a breeding ground for terrorists, Goran approached the issue differently. He called the PKK and Makhmour camp issue a Turkish problem that was "beyond time" for settlement. "In 2006, there is no justification for continuation of the Turk's program," he said. Sinjari said the inhabitants would go home to Turkey if the Turks were wise enough to propose an amnesty. The Turks,

however, would not bend on the PKK leadership, and would not go in this direction. He suggested the Turks should look at the political, social, and economic aspects of the problem of refugees at Makhmour, but instead they only looked at the military aspect. Sinjari commented that he believed the Turkish civilian authorities were unable to sway their military counterparts. Goran and Mamand agreed that any Turkish designs on entering the European Union would be dashed if they could not "solve their internal problems with minorities." Sinjari noted that the Turks had five armored bases in Kurdistan, and four bases with Special Forces. Their putative mission, he said, was to fight PKK, so they do nothing because armor is little help against rebels in the mountains.

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OIL AND FUEL IN NORTHERN IRAQ  
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¶14. (C) Asked about the energy situation, Sinjari noted that there was a significant problem. Iraq exports oil, but security was abysmal, he said. With regards to reports that Iraq's oil industry lost 6.5 billion dollars last year, Sinjari suggested the Iraqis should spend "that 0.5 billion" to secure and protect the industry and pipelines. Those the Iraqi government pays to protect pipelines -- tribes in western Iraq -- were the ones that were causing the damage, he averred. In Kirkuk, there were terrible security problems. Sinjari said that 10,000 persons worked in the oil industry there, and 99 percent of them were loyal to Saddam; historically, only Arabs favored by Saddam had received jobs in that strategic industry. Sinjari said that the problem was at the heart of the oil industry's security and that the people who ran the refineries were the ones who were allowing it to be sabotaged. He suggested that the current staff be sent home "with their pay" and that the Russians who built the refinery and installations in the first place should be brought back to make the oil industry work. Asked about the capabilities of Oil Minister Chalabi, Sinjari said, he "thinks about his pocket" only.

¶15. (C) Regarding accusations of trafficking and smuggling of fuel with complicity by the authorities on the KRG border, Sinjari became somewhat defensive. He said there were shortages in the KRG too. He explained that each region was given its share by the representatives of the oil company and "we get our share like anyone else." At the moment, Irbil had enough propane and benzene, and the recent agreement by Iraqi and Turkish authorities on payment of overdue fees meant the situation would ease soon. Sinjari confirmed reports that Norwegian exploration efforts, financed through the Northern Oil Company, had hit low-sulfur oil north of Dohuk. He added that they were planning to build a new refinery near the site. He said that in fact, there would be a new refinery in Irbil as well since it was sitting on a "sea of oil." Every city should have its own refinery, Sinjari said, which would help distribution woes.

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ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN NINEWA  
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¶16. (C) In addition to oil problems, Goran noted Moslawis were receiving fewer hours of electricity than they had a year before. He believed such conditions only bred discontent and fed directly into the hands of terrorists. Goran admitted the public had "every right" to be upset since the provincial government had "done nothing for three years." He said they needed to bridge this credibility gap by showing that they were solving problems. Goran said press reports of disgruntled Americans questioning the viability of reconstruction projects in Iraq were understandable. He said he was frustrated that the Iraq Government could not move beyond its highly centralized past, which complicated provincial government efforts. Goran said the biggest problem Ninewa faced was that it lacked funding (although he admitted there was money being sent soon from Baghdad). He said the provincial council had a list of prioritized projects and that all it needed was the resources to start them. He said the Provincial Reconstruction and

Development Committee (PRDC) had completed several projects in Ninewa. Taking a dig at USG and Coalition Force efforts, however, Goran said that almost the same number of projects had been done "without the PRDC's involvement." Goran said it was "very important" that Iraqis have a role in project oversight and management. Goran appeared to blame contracting corruption and overcharging on American ignorance. He said "only Iraqis" knew the "real" prices and quality of materials. And therefore the PRDC would be the best way to ensure the integrity of any project.

¶17. (C) Although Goran claimed Iraqis had made gains in areas such as freedom of speech, travel and association, he claimed the most important issue was to have a good economy. Goran and Mamand claimed poor economic conditions allowed terrorists to more easily spread their propaganda. Goran said many youth are brainwashed by terrorists who use them to plant bombs and commit attacks. Using Mosul University as an example, Goran noted there were several student groups who opposed the U.S. presence in Iraq by "breeding hate." He said the best way to combat such sentiments was to have more cultural exchanges. Noting his own experience studying in Europe, Goran said he believed exchange opportunities for the young were crucially important to bridging the cultural gap and ease tensions. Mamand said the PUK has worked in Ninewa to develop several "apolitical" youth centers. He claimed it was important to ensure youth were engaged in positive activities.

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SECURITY IMPROVEMENTS AND CONCERNS  
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¶18. (C) Goran said the security situation in Mosul has been improving and that security forces have been making progress. Goran said now that the Iraqi Police (IP) and Iraqi Army (IA) were doing a good job, the provincial government could concentrate on more important issues, such as trying to provide basic services. Goran noted the recent bombing of a popular restaurant frequented by IPs where two police and six civilians were killed. He said the people of Mosul were "tired of bombs and attacks," and after the incident many people were calling into television programs to denounce violence. Mamand said new Provincial Chief of Police (PCOP) Wathiq Al Qudir had made improvements in the city but that there were still corrupt people in the force left over from his predecessor. He said he has been working hard to get Al Qudir to remove these officers from the force. Goran commented that more should be done regarding background checks on volunteers since terrorists could easily enter the force. Goran and Mamand said they also hoped for a more representative IP, which could better provide security in Mosul and surrounding minority villages. Mamand said the launching of the Mosul Airport would be a bad idea, since the city was still overrun by terrorists. He recommended that efforts to continue with the project be put on hold until the security situation improved.

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COMMENT  
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¶19. (C) The Kurds are uniformly thankful for the American presence in the north, and clearly choose to portray themselves as closely aligned to U.S. goals. All interlocutors spoke of their parties' commitments to freedom and prosperity in Iraq, emphasizing that the legitimate goals of Kurds and other distinct groups should be respected; they portrayed their electoral and economic successes as successes of American policy as well, feigning surprise when, in discussions of security issues, their American guests spoke of the need to curb Kurdish enthusiasm for expansion south and west. It is telling that the Kurds living in Mosul, KDP and PUK alike, see the issues of Ninewa and Kurdistan through similar lens; Goran is not only the vice governor of Ninewa, but a significant player in Kurdistan politics, and Mamand, while director of the PUK in Ninewa and a leading member of the party nationally, is clearly up to his

elbows in Kurdistan politics as well. Gently, patiently, these Kurds are assessing their chances to effect change on such key issues as the fate of Kirkuk and maintaining control of provincial governments in the next elections. If they have their way, they will do so in such a manner that they can claim they are championing American goals in Iraq at the same time.

MUNTER